

Where My Sympathy Lies

The author of "Call It Sleep" makes clear his views on a public question

By Henry Roth

PROBABLY in common with a good many writers, my political development has not reached as high a level as it might—many of my beliefs seem the product more of intuition than of analysis. Nevertheless, I hold, however arrived at, that any writer who longs for justice and brotherhood among men must hate the exploitation of men, the sordidness that rears itself on such exploitation, and the twin pinnacles that cap it, fascism and war. Whoever hungers for justice must ally himself, if only in sympathy, with all those forces that struggle to liberate humanity from slavery and want. Any organization, any impulse of men that honestly and by its acts strives in the direction of such liberation, should enlist a writer's sympathy in direct proportion as there is a struggle for these aims. The recent trials of the Trotskyites in the U.S.S.R. therefore raises this question: to what extent does Trotskyism deserve the sympathy of a writer?

There are several things about this trial about which I am confused. Nevertheless, enough and more than enough has been revealed to convince me of the guilt of the accused; and by guilt, I mean that all their efforts were calculated to nullify or destroy the very growth of the safeguards that would ensure the freedom and fraternity of millions of men. But if I had any remnant of a doubt of this, it has vanished before the steps taken by the Trotskyites in this country to defend their leader. I refer to the libel suit contemplated by the Committee for the Defense of Trotsky against certain Communist leaders and publications in this country.

The Committee intends also to form an "impartial commission" and justifies this act by stating that:

The Communist Party cannot legitimately oppose the creation of such a commission, if only because of the fact that they themselves inspired the so-called counter-trial in London set up to deal with the so-called Leipzig trial of Dimitroff and his friends. If they have the so-called overwhelming proof against Trotsky they claim to have, let them confront Trotsky with it.—[N. Y. Times, Feb. 1.]

The more one studies this quotation, the clearer becomes the picture of the Trotskyite mentality. The elementary differences between the trial of Dimitroff in Germany and the trial of the Trotskyites in the Soviet Union are apparently no more important to Trotskyites than are facts. Dimitroff was a Communist in a Nazi court, a spokesman and a champion of the working class. In the very shadow of the ax, he maintained the justice of his cause; he enunciated his principles and announced his adherence to them. He main-

tained his innocence. Before the trial was over, and in the den of Hitlerism itself, he became the accuser of Naziism, the exposé of fascist barbarity wherever it existed, the symbol of heroic struggle against it. He was acquitted.

In what way were the principals in the recent Soviet trials similar? None maintained his innocence there, none became the accuser; no matter how brilliant, none was backed by a principle, all confessed their guilt. Some wept at the loathsome company and the bleakness and obscurity of the pass their historical steps had led them to, some bragged and some jeered, but they all stood convicted, their sentences sustained by demonstrations of Russian workers. I do not believe together with the Hearst press that these men were under the influence of mesmerism or mysterious narcotics; therefore, I believe them to be, as they themselves acknowledged, guilty.

Not only does Trotsky propose to prove the innocence of himself and his associates by a trial of the Soviet Union in which he becomes

the accuser, but also by a libel suit against working-class leaders and against working-class publications in a bourgeois court. It is by what such a step aims to accomplish that one can judge what Trotskyism is. Trotskyism becomes the barren woman in the fable of Solomon, the fable in which the king had to choose between the legitimate mother of a child and the spurious one. Solomon decided that the woman who was willing to let the infant live despite its being fostered by another, was indeed the mother of it. I am not Solomon. But Trotskyism seems to me more an expression of that monstrous kind of ego that, unwilling or unable to go through the pains of bearing and nurturing the growing spirit of liberation throughout the world, would rather see it severed by the sword than not possess it.

As a writer, more than ever involved in the growth of enlightenment and freedom, I can see only one way of accomplishing this, the united front against fascism—and one way sure to paralyze all our efforts, Trotskyism.



"For years I thought Mr. Trotsky was just as bad as Lenin."